

# Transition to College Life

Although major transitions such as starting college or moving to a new city or new country can be exciting, they can also produce feelings of uncertainty. Transitions can be stressful as they involve adapting to a new environment and lifestyle that may be very different from the one you have been used to. Meeting new people, coping with peer pressure and becoming more independent can seem daunting.

You may have had high expectations for college life. After being here for a while, the differences between your expectations and the realities begin to become clear—some things may be better than you expected, some may not have lived up to your expectations and others may just be different.

## Coping with Change

The first step in coping with change is to try and identify what aspects you are finding most difficult. Adjusting to major transitions takes time, and it is not uncommon to feel overwhelmed. You may be familiar with some of the following feelings often experienced by students:

### *Academic*

- Others seem more intelligent than you—perhaps you feel like an “imposter.” If you have been used to being “the best,” you may now feel like a small fish in a large pool. Adapting to this change can take time.
- Fear of failure, particularly if you feel under pressure from others to succeed, can affect your ability to focus and maintain a sustainable work routine. You might start to question your choice of course or major, particularly if you made this choice partly to satisfy others’ expectations.
- Managing an increased academic workload and adapting to different working schedules can seem daunting at first. It is important to remember that everyone’s working routines differ, and you may need to experiment before you find the best way of managing your own academic workload.

### *Social*

- If this is the first time you have left home, adapting to increased freedom and independence can be more difficult in reality than you may have expected. In addition, finding the balance between the demands of academic work and developing new friendships can be challenging at first.
- You might find yourself trying to cope with increased peer pressure, both socially and academically. If you find it difficult to form new friendships, you can experience feelings of isolation, particularly if others appear to be socializing more than you.

### *Emotional*

- You may find yourself feeling more homesick than you anticipated and more anxious than usual. Even if you have started to form new friendships, you can feel isolated when your usual support networks are no longer immediately available.
- You may also experience behavioral changes such as difficulty concentrating or making decisions and changes in appetite or sleep.

## Managing Pressure

There are times during the semester when most people feel pressured. This is a common experience and is not just you. Listen to your body and feelings and work with them rather than against them. Try to:

- Plan ahead to reduce pressure.
- Use pressure positively—to motivate.
- Separate others' expectations from your own.
- Put it all in perspective.
- Reward yourself—give yourself praise for what you have achieved.

## Maintain Some Balance in Life

*Don't study/work all the time.* Make sure you find a sustainable balance between studying/working, leisure, physical activity and social activity. Ensure that you make some time every day to relax. A strategy that can be helpful is to ensure that you take some time off every day and a whole day off every week.

*Maintain a balance between time alone and time with others.* Friends can be a great support; they can also be a great excuse or distraction not to study. Try to organize in advance when you will be able to do things together so that you can manage your studying time more effectively.

*Create a routine/pattern for your days and weeks.* Having some regular structure to your day and week is helpful. Depending on your major and timetable, there can seem to be little structure in student life. It is important to create this structure for yourself. Everyone works effectively in different ways and at different times of day. Develop a pattern that works for you, and keep this as your normal routine.

*Get fit/stay fit.* It is much easier to cope with new challenges when you are fit and healthy, have a good diet and get adequate sleep. If you don't already take part in sports activities, consider joining something new. Try and develop a routine and think about the best ways to structure your days for you.

*Separate study and non-study times and spaces.* Try to be clear with yourself about when you are, and are not, studying. You may find it helps to separate your room(s) into work and non-work areas—no matter how tiny these areas may be. This can help you to work more effectively when you have decided to and are in your “work place.” Similarly, this can help you to relax when you want to, away from your classwork. Consider studying in different locations for part of the day so that you do not become isolated in your room. Experiment with studying in libraries and coffee shops to see what is best for you.

## Finally, Don't Avoid the Problem

There is a wide range of support services available at the university and beyond. You don't have to maintain an “I'm OK” image all of the time. If you feel that you need to talk to someone about challenges you are facing, it's important to talk to someone sooner rather than later. This could include:

- Friends or family
- Academic advisor
- Job supervisor
- A medical professional (Student Health Center)
- Counselor (Kelly Center)